In Context

In Context informs, educates, and creates new ideas on Context Sensitive Solutions

D5 Director Defines CSS

By Cindy Utter

*This is Part Two of the District 5 Director's definition of CSS. Part One is in the Spring 2003 edition of **In Context**. In that article, the Director said Caltrans must "evolve to remain relevant and provide leadership."*

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Caltrans is now implementing Context Sensitive Solutions in response to "significant" changes in the transportation industry during the last 30 years, according to District 5 Director R. Gregg Albright.

He referred to a "fundamental power shift" resulting from the passage of Senate Bill 45. This legislation transferred authority for 75 percent of State highway funds to regional agencies, and 25 percent to Caltrans for interregional projects. Previously, Caltrans controlled most of the funds.

Newly empowered community action groups might be less willing to accept a professional recommendation just because Caltrans gave it, Albright said.

"The substance of merit doesn't guarantee a project will go forward." Essentially, community groups now have more "local control, influence and the ability to veto through political or legal

means." Relationships with locals have also "fundamentally shifted," he said. "All key stakeholders must be informed and effectively engaged in decision-making."

He called the collaborative process "co-creating," which differs greatly from "selling" a project idea. It's much more than just getting community involvement. "Key stakeholders must truly influence the entire process from setting the vision and problem definition to reaching the final solution."

Everyone at Caltrans is responsible for implementing CSS, he said. "It calls for complete ownership and a corporate, or statewide, transformation."

This means CSS will be in every context—whether it's in a planning document, project, operation or maintenance.

The context varies regarding CSS, he said. For instance, CSS can involve a maintenance worker unclogging a drain to prevent flooding on an adjacent property owner's land. It also means collaborating with externals on a proposed major Corridor Capacity project. "Every interaction with others needs to be fundamentally sensitive to the context."

Please go to *Director*, page 2

CSS is Doing Good Business

By Tim Richards
Resident Engineer, D5/CR
CSS Technical Assistance Group

Context Sensitive Solutions is a product of doing good business. It is a community process that involves more than changing the physical design on bridge rails, signal poles, sound walls, median plantings and more.

For example, during the design process for a pavement rehabilitation project, the

Design Engineer works with local business owners and develops a traffic management plan for the construction phase that meets their needs as well as those of the community.

That plan involves directly contacting, and fully communicating, with the locals and explaining why the project is needed—essential elements to being sensitive to the context of the project.

In Construction, it is important for the Resident Engineer to know and understand the goals and reasoning behind the traffic plan. Otherwise, a proposed Contract Change Order—requested by either the Engineer or contractor—may negatively impact the commitments made earlier to the locals.

To prevent this, those who developed the plan must be involved with the proposed changes and the locals need to be fully informed as well.

I usually e-mail for review all the change orders to the Project Manager, Design Engineer and all the affected functional units. Waiting for the Project Manager to contact other functional units might actually delay the approval process for the change orders.

Please go to *Business*, page 2

In Context is a periodic newsletter coordinated by the District 5 Community Planning Branch.

SUMMER 2003

DIRECTOR *(continued from front page)*

CSS is becoming well known as "a new way of doing business," he said, crediting Director Jeff Morales. The Director's Policy #22 directs actions for instituting CSS.

Caltrans recognizes implementing CSS is an issue, he said. "We're working to define the problems, shortcomings and expectations. And we'll involve externals in evaluating our performance."

District 5 knows how to incorporate CSS, he said. For generations, it has worked with many community active Central Coast residents who desire a great

quality of life along with a protected natural environment. As such, it has many excellent CSS examples, both large and small—with the greatest being the solutions that all stakeholders have endorsed, he said. The State's current major budget deficit does not mean CSS is no longer relevant. Rather, it means "we need to do more CSS today than yesterday – it's the fundamental process we use to solve problems."

Albright is confident his staff is up to the task. "Caltrans' greatest asset is our people. We want to empower them to use their intellectual abilities to the

maximum." This means being "creative, innovative and pro-active" more than "reactive."
He quoted the late Buckminster Fuller: "If you want to teach

people a new way of thinking, don't bother trying to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which will lead to new ways of thinking."

Implementing CSS requires the following, according to District 5 Director R. Gregg Albright:

➤ **Recognize the issue.**
➤ **Define the problem with input from external stakeholders.**
➤ **Establish expectations from the top corporate level down to the most detailed function.**
➤ **Remove institutional barriers.**
➤ **Establish new procedures and processes.**
➤ **Train and equip staff to be successful.**
➤ **Measure performance.**

To find out more about CSS, visit the Project for Public Spaces website at http://www.pps.org/CSS/cssonline.htm.

BUSINESS *(continued from front page)*

If a quick response is needed, or more background information must be provided, I call the project manager and functional unit, and work out the details. I document concurrence with either a signed Contract Change Order Memorandum or e-mail. Non-responses are documented as well.

All coordination that occurs with other units, agencies and/or locals, should be included in the Contract Change Order Memorandum to explain why the change is needed and what impacts will result.

Construction does not want to add more procedures, checklists or sign-offs to implement context sensitive solutions. But we do need to clarify and follow our existing procedures.

On all projects, the Resident Engineer should establish good working relationships with the following: Project Development, Project Management, the Maintenance Area Superintendent and Supervisors; local school districts and transit agencies; and permitting agencies such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Army Corps, Regional Water

Quality Control Board, California Highway Patrol and local police organizations.

The latest edition of the Construction Manual covers many of the issues that may impact the CSS process—but it must be read, understood and followed.

Once a project is built, the CSS Technical Assistance Group suggests that Caltrans staff and external partners participate in a "Lessons Learned" activity reviewing the good, the bad and the ugly.

Above all, it is best to incorpo-

rate CSS into the project scope, design, cost and contract documents prepared during the planning and project development phases. Last minute requests for changes at the construction stage are neither effective nor "sensitive" to everyone's needs. CSS features should be considered early and often prior to construction.

Lastly, we must remember that it's not any one unit in charge of doing CSS—it's all of us.

Pat Connally, Caltrans Central Region Chief Construction West, contributed to this report.